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SUBJECT: CENTCOM COMMANDER PETRAEUS' MEETING WITH SULTAN  
QABOOS (NOVEMBER 30)

Classified By: Ambassador Gary A. Grappo for Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

Summary

1. (C) U.S. CENTCOM Commander General David Petraeus and the Ambassador met for an unprecedented three hours on November 30 with Sultan Qaboos at Beit al Baraka palace outside Muscat. In a wide-ranging discussion of regional issues, the Sultan acknowledged progress in Iraq and expressed a degree of approval of Prime Minister Maliki, but noted historically weak Oman-Iraq ties. On Iran, the Sultan described the difficulties Oman faced in managing relations with its much larger neighbor and how he had consciously limited the number of Iranians living in Oman. The Sultan expressed concern over Yemen, enumerating some of the challenges faced by that country while highlighting Omani efforts to assist the government in Sanaa. The Sultan and General Petraeus also discussed India-Pakistan relations, Syria and maritime piracy. End Summary.

Iraq

2. (C) General Petraeus commented that he had studied Oman's successful strategy to end the Dhofar rebellion in the early 1970s in developing the counter-insurgency doctrine that he employed in Iraq. The Sultan responded that during a rebellion or insurgency people will naturally seek "what is better for them" and will continue to create problems if they are ignored. Agreeing with the Sultan's approach to reconciliation, General Petraeus described efforts to provide for and integrate the Sons of Iraq into the country's security forces.

3. (C) Referencing the Iran-Iraq war, the Sultan recalled that Iraq had sought his help in the conflict, including a request for maps of Bandar Abbas and assistance in striking the port there. The Sultan had refused, telling the Iraqis, "When the times comes to be helpful, I want to be helpful." The Sultan also related how an emissary he had sent to Iraq to discuss Baghdad's support for South Yemen had been treated badly. The Iraqis, he explained, had arrogantly fancied themselves as the leaders of the Arab world. Consequently, Oman's relations with Iraq had never been very strong. The Sultan said he was nevertheless very interested in the success of Iraq and opined that Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki, to a great extent, had the interests of Iraq at heart and was different than he had been described.

4. (C) After listening to an update from General Petraeus on the situation in Iraq over the previous eighteen months, including the recent dramatic decrease in violent incidents, the Sultan commented that past Arab interference in Iraq had not been helpful, and may even have aggravated divisions

between Sunnis and the Shi'a in Iraq. Further positive progress in Iraq would take time. Iran did not want to see a strong Iraq, he asserted, but neither did it want a Sunni resurgence.

Iran  
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15. (S/NF) General Petraeus expressed concern over continued Iranian attempts to exert control over Iraq and to "Lebanonize" the country, noting the capture of a senior Lebanese Hizballah officer in Iraq. He further noted the different means that Iran employed to interfere in Iraqi affairs, as well as the multiple Iranian actors involved, including the Commander of the Quds Force who claimed to control Iranian policy in Iraq and elsewhere in the region independent of President Ahmadinejad. The Sultan responded that Hizballah was originally created to counter "other influences" in Lebanon and only later was embraced by Syria. Asserting that "Iraq is different," the Sultan said he did not believe that Iran would be able to dominate Iraq. He also commented that Iran's Supreme Leader (Ali Khamenei) was able to direct policy and issue orders without regard to the views of the Iranian President, foreign ministry, or parliament.

16. (C) Highlighting the U.S. commitment to keep open the Strait of Hormuz, General Petraeus thanked the Sultan for Oman's private rebuke of Iran following the January 2008 incident in the Strait between an Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGC-N) ship and a U.S. naval vessel. General

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Petraeus also expressed appreciation for Oman's support for strategic talks between the GCC and the U.S. on security issues, noting that GCC cooperation in Shared Early Warning (SEW) and coalition maritime activities, for example, would definitely have an impact on Iran.

17. (C) The Sultan replied that Oman had to be "careful" in managing relations with its much larger neighbor. Specifically, Oman had to treat the Iranians with respect while at the same time keeping them at a comfortable distance, which at times was a difficult balancing act. Dealing with the former Shah of Iran, he commented, was much different. Sultan Qaboos also explained that as a matter of deliberate policy Oman did not allow large numbers of Iranians to work and remain in the country. As a result, there were only a few hundred Iranians in Oman. With respect to the current Iranian leadership, the Sultan predicted that "velayat-e faqih" would be inadequate to the task of governing a modern Iran. "Iran will have to change," he opined, "but we must all be patient" for that change.

Yemen  
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18. (C) Sultan Qaboos expressed deep concern about the situation in Yemen. "Yemen can only be managed, not ruled," he remarked, citing as examples the extensive criminal network in the north and the multiple escapes of prisoners from Yemeni jails. The many different peoples in Yemen, including the northern tribes who believed they were superior and southern residents who were stuck in old thinking, had to become more united and feel like equals in order for the country to move forward. The Bakhil and Hashid tribes in particular need to work together, the Sultan remarked.

19. (C) Observing that Yemen needed to make some "tough decisions," the Sultan said that the Yemeni government also required outside help. Although "some" GCC states "do not like Yemen," Oman had pledged \$100 million in assistance after the London donors meeting. Oman had also aided Yemen by sending food shipments and continues to provide economic assistance to communities along the Oman-Yemen border. Yemenis also continue to come to hospitals in the southern

Omani city of Salalah for medical care. The Sultan further noted that he recently met for two hours with the commander of Yemen's special forces, President Saleh's son, who "needs seasoning." Oman was concurrently concerned with border security along the Omani-Yemeni frontier. The Sultan noted that in 2006 the government cracked down on illegal immigrants who had transited Yemen to Oman and deported many of them back to Yemen.

Pakistan/India

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¶10. (S/NF) General Petraeus discussed U.S. concerns over al-Qaeda activity in Pakistan and the challenges faced by the Pakistani government. Questioned by the Sultan whether al-Qaeda was present in Baluchistan, General Petraeus replied that the Taliban posed more of a risk in Baluchi areas. The Sultan stated that Indian Prime Minister Singh had told him during his November 8-10 visit to Muscat that he would "move heaven and earth" to help stabilize Pakistan, even though Pakistan does not do much to help itself. In regards to the Mumbai attack, the Sultan said that Omani intelligence believes an "outside organization" was responsible. Achieving stability in Pakistan, he continued, would require a reduction in the birth rate and a "change in culture," just as Oman had needed when he assumed power in 1970.

Syria

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¶11. (S/NF) On Syria, General Petraeus pointed out that the regime in Damascus had placed itself in a very difficult position due to its involvement in the assassination of Lebanese PM Hariri, its failure to take action when provided intelligence on terrorist facilitation networks, and its ambitions to dominate Arab Baathist parties. What really persuades Syrian policies and action, the Sultan responded, is money.

Piracy

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¶12. (C) Turning to the issue of maritime piracy, General

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Petraeus explained the difficulties in combating pirates off the coasts of Somalia and Yemen, as well as steps that shipping companies could take to help avoid pirate attacks. The Sultan replied that Oman had dealt with pirates since the 19th century, and that one of his ancestors had been assassinated by pirates while leading an operation to put down an insurrection in Bahrain. According to the Sultan, the pirate attacks further highlighted the need for an effective national government in Somalia.

¶13. (U) General Petraeus has cleared this message.  
GRAPPO